



TROPIC NEWS

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

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Whale Season Again

Every year Humpback whales (and occasionally others) swim South from their summer feeding grounds near Iceland, Greenland and Eastern Canada to the relatively shallow water of the West Indies. They usually first appear here in mid-to-late December and remain through the end of April. The greatest numbers are usually seen in February and early March. Interestingly enough calves are born between January and March, accounting for the large number of calves observed in the Caribbean. Humpbacks may not feed during the winter season due to the unavailability of their preferred food in tropical waters.

Whales are mostly seen on the north coast of our islands but are occasionally seen on the south as well. They are observed swimming at the surface, sometimes leaping clear of the water (breaching) and falling back on their sides with a resounding splash. The Division of Fish and Wildlife reminds the public that these creatures are endangered (world populations are around 10,000) and that venturing too close to them for curiosity or fun purposes is considered harassment and may be disturbing to the whales.

During the 1988-1989 winter season 32 reports of whale sighting were made, including 63 adults and 15 calves. If you are fortunate enough to see one of these magnificent creatures please call Ralf Boulton at the Division of Fish and Wildlife at 775-6762. Please provide the date, time, location, type of whale, number of adults and calves, size and the direction they were headed.

Help our Wildlife!

Nearly two months after Hugo, life is slowly returning to normal in the Virgin Islands. Greening hillsides speak of our recovery. Yet some of our wildlife populations may still be suffering from food shortages. Hugo's ravishing winds caused severe windburn and stripped the trees of their leaves, flowers, fruit, and seeds. Wildlife which depends on these food sources include Scaly-naped Pigeons, White-crowned Pigeon (which are locally endangered), bananaquit "sugar birds", hummingbirds, doves, grassquits, and fruit-bats. Although many trees and shrubs are flowering again, it may take as long as six months for them to bear fruit and seed.

Can YOU help? Yes.... By placing protected bird feeders around your yard, you can help wildlife survive. Feeders with sugar water, pieces of local fruit and local seeds will help our birds during the lean months and may prevent them from leaving our islands for areas less affected by Hugo. Reporting injured or weakened wildlife so that they may receive treatment will also help. For more information on how YOU can help, contact Division of Fish and Wildlife at 775-6762 on St. Thomas, or 772-1955 on St. Croix.

Tropic News Grows

We are slowly expanding our newsletter's circulation. Please let us know if we have any incorrect information on your address label. If you know of other people or businesses interested in receiving our monthly 'Tropic News', call or write us with the name and address. If you want to be removed from our mailing list, let us know, otherwise expect to continue receiving them. Tropic News is printed on recycled paper, so expect to see various colors in the future.

Attention Local Divers

The Division of Fish and Wildlife is asking for your help. Approximately 10,000 to 12,000 fish traps were lost in the ocean because of Hugo's ferocity. We need to find out where these traps are so that we may recover them. If YOU see a fish trap that is not marked by a painted buoy attached to a line, do not handle it in any way, but call us with the exact location that you saw it. Ghost traps have the potential to kill hundreds of fish.

We are also interested in finding out which underwater areas around the U.S.V.I. were significantly impacted by Hugo. If you dive a familiar reef and discover that it has received extensive damage, contact the Division of Fish and Wildlife 775-6762 (St. Thomas) or 772-1955 (St. Croix).

Concerned Citizen

While cleaning up pieces of dead wood from her east end yard, "Bobbie", from St. Thomas, discovered a snake that didn't look too well. Carefully putting it in a box, she then called us at the Division. We immediately retrieved the snake which turned out to be a Virgin Islands tree boa, an endangered species with a very distinct pattern. The tree boa is a slender grayish brown mottled snake with a cream colored belly. It can grow up to 2½ feet in length and can be identified as a boa by it's narrow neck in comparison to it's head and body. It is the only patterned snake in the U.S.V.I.. This snake is completely harmless to humans and it eats only mice and lizards. The Division appreciates the protection that "Bobbie" provided for this snake. Thanks!

GOVERNMENT OF
THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES

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Department of Planning & Natural Resources
DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
101 Estate Nazareth
St. Thomas, Virgin Islands 00802

Virgin Island Marine Reserve System

Draft regulations for the protection of extremely sensitive marine areas may be expedited quicker than expected, thanks to Hugo. The territory's fishery was fragile before the storm, and now we have a natural disaster on top of a depleted fishery. Hugo may be forcing us to act quickly to save the V.I.'s marine ecosystem.

The Virgin Island Marine Reserve System (VIMRS) is a proposal to regulate specific seagrass and coral reef areas. The seagrass areas are vitally important because they are key habitat for the endangered sea turtles, juvenile reef fish, and the rehabilitating queen conch. Seagrass areas also provide stability to the sea bottom, and help to prevent silt and sediment from suffocating adjoining coral reefs.

The coral reefs that are proposed are selected because of their special value, either intrinsic, as fishery habitat, or because they provide protection for sensitive shore areas from wave and storm action.

The VIMRS initially recommended setting aside 13 coral reef and 9 seabed areas, but Hugo's effects have changed some reef structures significantly, so a thorough survey of these and other marine habitats will be done prior to the enactment of the VIMRS. The Division of Fish and Wildlife will provide the public with all the specifics and maps of the protected areas as soon as VIMRS is passed.